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New Year, no change

29 December 2008

December's cold weather is forecast to continue through the New Year period. Although dry and settled, with little sign of any significant snowfall, overnight frost will be widespread with temperatures by day only a couple of degrees above freezing in many places. Freezing fog may also become a problem for travellers over the rest of the holiday period.

At these times Met Office health forecasting services are at their most useful, helping people suffering from long term conditions such as Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) stay healthy and out of hospital.

During winter months, people with various health conditions are at increased risk of becoming unwell. The level of risk is strongly influenced by weather conditions, virus activity in the community and other factors. So far this winter almost 18,000 people have registered for the Healthy Outlook® scheme which is designed for COPD patients so that they can manage their condition more effectively.

Several health authorities are reporting additional strain on services as respiratory admissions climb to near-epidemic levels in many areas across the country. Met Office health forecasting has proved a great success for both patients and health authorities, helping reduce hospital admissions and bringing reassurance to patients who use the service.

Wayne Elliott, Head of Health Forecasting at the Met Office hopes many more patients will soon be able to benefit from these services. He said: "Around 30 Primary Care Trusts and Health Boards have taken the service this winter and we anticipate delivering our forecasts to even more patients through the season".

Latest forecast

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Notes to Editors

- The outdoor environment affects the health of people with COPD during winter. There are 100,000 COPD-related hospital admissions in England, and the NHS spends £600 million annually looking after people with COPD.
- Healthy Outlook® COPD Forecast Alert can drastically reduce hospital admissions, while providing people with COPD an improved quality of care. By being alerted in advance of impending high-risk periods, people with COPD are reminded to take appropriate action to keep themselves well.